



The Landscape Strategic Issues

Strategic issues were developed from information gathered in the focus groups, interviews, surveys, and from analysis of existing information. These issues form the foundation upon which *The Compass* was developed and are summarized on the following pages.



FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

The existence of fish and wildlife depends on habitat: they need adequate amounts of quality habitat that is arranged effectively to provide food, water, cover, and space throughout all of their life stages. When habitats are altered or lost—from human activities or natural processes—the distribution and abundance of fish and wildlife, and the associated recreational opportunities they provide, can be significantly impacted. Most changes tend to happen slowly over long periods of time, making it difficult to reverse the trend. For example, invasive plants, such as cheatgrass and yellow starthistle, have been spreading throughout Idaho for years and are significantly affecting wildlife habitat. Habitat losses may eventually lead to severe declines in fish and wildlife and eventual listing under the Endangered Species Act. Because it does not control most of the state’s habitat for fish and wildlife, the Department must work with other agencies and private landowners to improve habitat.

FISH AND GAME FOR FISHING AND HUNTING

Fishing, hunting, and trapping are traditional Idaho activities and part of Idaho’s culture, lifestyle, and economy. A primary responsibility of the Department is to provide “continued supplies” of fish and wildlife “for hunting, fishing and trapping” (*Idaho Code 36-103*). The vast majority of Department funding, programs, and activities directly or indirectly support this function.

In managing for abundant fish and game the Department must consider people’s tolerance for, or competition with, fish and wildlife. People’s use of land and water can negatively impact fish and wildlife and their habitats. Conversely, wildlife can damage private property and crops and compete for land and water resources used by people or domestic animals. The challenge for fish and wildlife management is to balance the public’s desire for hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities with the conflicts between fish and wildlife and people.



COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

Managing Idaho’s fish and wildlife is more effective when the Department clearly communicates with the public. Successfully communicating with Department stakeholders means understanding what information and services they want, developing products and services to meet those needs, and effectively delivering those products and services. The Department must provide for two-way communication with the public.

INVOLVING DEPARTMENT STAKEHOLDERS

The Department manages the fish and wildlife of Idaho in trust for the people of the state. Therefore, Department programs must be aligned with the needs, desires, and expectations of Idaho citizens. Understanding citizens and involving them in decision making can improve management decisions, as well as agency effectiveness and credibility. Not involving citizens weakens public support and agency credibility and may lead to challenges to management such as ballot initiatives, legislative mandates, and legal actions.

ACCESS FOR FISH- AND WILDLIFE-BASED RECREATION

Even though the majority of Idaho’s land is publicly owned, some of the state’s best fishing and hunting, as well as quality habitats, are on privately owned lands. Often, private lands are located in valleys along rivers and streams, and access to public land and waters can be gained only through private holdings. Legally, private landowners are well within their rights to regulate public access to and across their private property, and some choose to prohibit public access. Landowners close their lands to public access for a variety of reasons. Some access is lost when new owners buy land for their exclusive recreational use. Lack of access to private land and lack of access across private land to public land are problems for fish and wildlife recreationists throughout the state.



RARE AND NONGAME ANIMALS AND NATIVE PLANTS

In addition to game animals and fish, the Department is responsible for managing all wildlife and native plant species. Nearly 85 percent of Idaho's animals are "nongame" (not hunted, fished, or trapped). More information is needed to conserve nongame and native plant species including their population size and trend, life history, and where they are found. Conserving rare species and their habitats ensures their continued presence in Idaho for future generations and keeps them off the Endangered Species list. The Department needs to have adequate programs to conserve nongame and native plants but receives limited funding for these programs, primarily from the sale of wildlife license plates, federal grants, and donations. New financial resources other than hunting and fishing license revenue are needed.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR FISH- AND WILDLIFE-BASED RECREATION

Idaho has an abundance of fish and wildlife for people to enjoy in various ways. Idaho has a rich heritage of hunting, fishing, and trapping, but some sportsmen and women are concerned that traditional harvesting is at risk. Although the percentage of Idahoans hunting has decreased slightly, public support for legal hunting is high and anti-hunting sentiment is low. Promoting ethical conduct and fair chase practices toward fish and wildlife are essential to maintaining public support for hunting, fishing, trapping, and "nonconsumptive" wildlife recreation—such as viewing and photographing wildlife.

In addition to promoting the public's ethical conduct around wildlife, the Department must also consider ethics in its management actions. The public's support for hunting and fishing is based, in part, on people's acceptance of Department management actions such as hunting regulations, predator control, research methods, and wildlife capture and transplanting activities.

DIVERSE FISH- AND WILDLIFE-BASED RECREATION

The Department currently accommodates diverse experiences such as trophy and catch-and-keep fisheries, nonmotorized and motorized access during hunting season, controlled and general hunts, youth hunts, and hunts of various methods of take. Providing diverse fish- and wildlife-based experiences requires that the Department understand the different needs, preferences, and values of the public and then develop opportunities to accommodate them, while also taking into account fish and wildlife populations and addressing the impact of recreational use on fish and wildlife.

Idahoans and visitors to the state seek wildlife-based recreation in nonconsumptive ways (for example, viewing, photographing, and learning about wildlife). Including nonconsumptive opportunities in addition to traditionally emphasized hunting and fishing increases recreational opportunities, tourism, and economic benefits to local communities.



FUNDING

The Department's main funding source comes from one segment of the population—hunters and anglers—primarily through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. This money has been—and will continue to be—used to manage fish and wildlife for hunting and fishing. Hunting and fishing license fees need to be adjusted periodically to keep pace with the increasing cost of managing hunting and fishing programs.

The Department will not use hunting and fishing license fees to meet all the desires of the public, other agencies, and local governments for managing fish, wildlife, and native plants. Funding sources other than hunting and fishing license fees are needed to meet the demand for nongame, wildlife viewing, and native plant programs.

Department programs for game animals and fish often benefit all citizens of the state. Hunters and anglers pay nearly the entire bill for these programs. Broadening the funding base beyond hunting and fishing licenses would improve both game and nongame programs and more fairly distribute the costs to all people who benefit from the Department's activities.

COLLABORATION

Fish and wildlife management in Idaho is complex—and becoming more so—because fish and wildlife issues and Department responsibilities overlap with those of other state and federal agencies, tribal governments, nongovernmental organizations, private landowners, and businesses. This

overlap has increased the need to coordinate, collaborate, develop partnerships, and, in some instances, share responsibilities for fish and wildlife management. It has also resulted in the need to consider a greater diversity of views and interests when making management decisions. Because views and interests of the public often conflict, collaborative decision making is essential for developing lasting solutions that benefit fish, wildlife, and people.



FISH AND WILDLIFE DISEASES

Fish and wildlife diseases can impact free-ranging fish and wildlife populations, farmed fish, farmed elk, domestic livestock, and humans. Both native and exotic diseases have the potential to harm Idaho's fish and wildlife and domestic animals. Disease introductions are likely to increase in the future due to a number of factors including increased global movements of people and animals, increased fish and game farming, and feeding of wildlife. Preventing and controlling disease is important from a biological, economic, and recreational perspective.



WORKFORCE

To be an effective agency, the Department must hire and retain qualified employees. The workforce also needs to be the right size to fulfill the mission and meet the public expectations for service and stewardship of fish and wildlife. Agency performance is best when employee morale is high and employees feel that their efforts are valued.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Facilities must be safe, provide an efficient work environment, and support good customer service. Facilities in some locations are not adequate to meet the expanding responsibilities of the Department. In the past 10 years, information technology has become crucial to fish and wildlife management, and the Department must take full advantage of advances in information management systems to improve efficiency and service to the public.